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ABSTRACT

The environment or climate of a school is determined by more than its physical characteristics. Among the other factors affecting school environment are the school's philosophy, students, communications, teachers, discipline, parents, support services, issuance of awards, and special programs. A positive school environment can be fostered by establishing a school philosophy stressing that children come first and emphasizing love, pride, and the encouragement of pluralism. Student activities that focus on students' social and emotional growth help support a positive environment. Such activities include student government, student safety patrols, special recognition events, and opportunities for student involvement in school operations. Maintaining awareness of the school's interest in the students and the availability of activities is a primary role of internal communications. Teachers can be involved professionally and socially in efforts to enhance the environment. Finally, parents, parent-teacher organizations, and community supporters can all become active in developing positive attitudes toward the school. (PGD)

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POSITIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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Webster defines environment as: to surround, to encompass, to encircle, to envelop that which environs, external conditions which determine modification in the development of organic life. A word synonymous with school environment is climate, as: the general atmospherical condition (temperature, moisture, etc.) of a country or region. Climate is commonly thought of as "hot" and "cold" or "wet" and "dry".

Whenever students, teachers, or parents walk into a school they usually can feel the climate of that school by the interior or the exterior of that building. If the outside of the building projects only a physical plant, there is most often no feeling or a "cool" feeling from the exterior. As the front doors of that building are opened, the physical environment of the interior portions of the building makes one feel additionally "cool" or "warm". Those external conditions with which people come in contact affect their lives as well as the development of any life that

enters the school and is further exposed to those "external" features which help to determine the modifications in the development" of the life of those entering. The climate of the school is a feeling that we pick up from floor to the ceiling of that front foyer. The front hallway or foyer of your school gives the first impression to a visitor as to the climate of that school.

How often have we walked into a school or better yet a classroom, without any students or teachers present, looked around that classroom and said to ourselves, "What a wonderful classroom... What a warm classroom... If I had a child I would want my child to be in this classroom". You never saw the teacher... you never saw the kids... all you saw was a classroom. Something in those external conditions "eveloped" you to form that impression!

What one saw was what Webster defines as the "exterior factor that determines or modifies the lives" of the people who come

in contact with that school or classroom. The factors just didn't happen. They were made up of the personality of the teacher, the various personalities of the 24 to 30 students and also, to some degree, the work of the central office curriculum specialist, support service personnel, and many more folks.

So often what is interpreted as environment is the external properties of that building. However, we often fail to realize or give credit to the idea that positive school environment or climate is not only the physical, external factors of what we see as evidence that gives us the "warm" feeling, but the personnel involved and the personalities of those involved who are responsible for that climate.

What can be contended is that school environment that projects "warm climate" is not made up solely by the interior or exterior properties of the school building.

There are many other factors that make up that Positive School Environment. Some of those factors are: 1. School Philosophy, 2. Students, 3. Communications, 4. Teachers, 5. Discipline, 6. Parents, 7. Support Services, 8. Issuance of Awards, and 9. Special Programs. All of these areas affect the external factors that make up that building environment.

Ideas for building a positive school environment through School Philosophy and Discipline: All schools that are accredited must provide a recorded statement of philosophy that addresses the academic standard and the well being of the children that attend that school. This philosophy is usually fairly well standardized from school to school and generally expressed in jargon related to education.

However, in order for the philosophy to be expressed in the environment it must go beyond that of educational jargon provided for in the accreditation document.

It must be exhibited within the external features of the school as well as by all the personnel who work or volunteer in that school.

The bottom line of the philosophy must be that "Children Come First". "Children Come First" signs may be posted in the office, workrooms, and in any other area in which adults tend to gather.

The philosophy must be build around a strong discipline code that is based on "Love" and a positive application of behavioral characteristics that project love.

A committee of teachers and parents were once asked, "Other than academics, what would you expect your child to receive from a public school environment? They unanimously agreed on what can be referred to as the 5 C's. Courtesy, cooperation, consideration, care and common sense.

Toward the positive application of these five characteristics a discipline code can be based. If one could think of any behavorial problem in which a child may go astray, that negative problem could be related to one of those five characteristics, hopefully, in a positive manner. These 5 C's could be posted in handbooks, visible as signs in the building, and teachers could discuss and compliment students frequently when they exhibit positive examples of the 5 C's. Separate student handbooks for the primary grades and upper grades may be designed to be given and used by the students as their own handbook on discipline.

The philosophy of the school must have "LOVE" as a base. Students, as well as teachers, should not fear expressing their love for the students and one another. Love can be expressed by teachers, holding a child's hand while leading a line to and from lunch or a support activity...touching students on the hand or shoulder when first addressing them or giving a "high or low

five". Students may want to give the "I love You" in sign language as a normal way of greeting. Winking, smiling, hugging and even kissing (not on the lips) can be considered a show of affection without being charged with sex abuse.

The philosophy of taking pride in your school environment through the students can be expressed in several ways; Is there a school song? Are there school colors? Is there a school mascot? Does the PTA or school sell personalized school garments? Is there a general theme for the year? Does the school have a school banner, safety patrol banner, school emblem?

The school philosophy must also be entrenched in pluralism. If any segment of the school population of sex, race, or ethnic origin is shown discrimination, the environment will reflect this in ways most often subtle. The philosophy of a school must project pluralism in: pictures drawn by the students, professional paint-

ings, or store purchased pictures showing different races, celebration of national ethnic dates, Lunar New Year celebrations and cultural dinners.

The philosophy that encompasses pluralism, can be reflected in the environment as teachers incorporate related activities into their learning units and discussions about differences in the human race- discussions that talk about differences in skin color, hair texture, facial features, and cultures.

The discipline code of a school that projects a positive school environment must reject strongly any dialogue that permits the "Archie Bunker" type of language. "Archie Bunker" type of bigotry concerning race, sex or ethnic backgrounds very often is offensive to those who are made the "butt" of the humor. A pluralistic environment must take great strides in projecting acceptable behavior to students through teachers, parents and community.

Ideas on building a Positive School Environment through student activities: A school environment must not only project the academic growth of the student population but equally the social and emotional growth. Learning is often based on readiness. We too often lose sight of the social and emotional readiness that is needed by students in order for them to grow academically. Further, if our accreditation philosophy is concerned with the "whole child", we must provide the experience that projects a positive environment of social and emotional growth.

The basis for a school environment that projects the social and emotional growth of the student body must be centered in a strong student government.

A student government environment must be one that gives students permission to exercise leadership. An environment which offers room for correction and counseling in an atmosphere that permits a child to

grow and learn from their leadership role.

The student government should be annually elected through the democratic process. Officers include a President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.

Student governement committees help the elected officers to accomplish the goals of the school. A safety committee made up of the safety patrols. A building and grounds committee which not only assists the custodians in keeping the building and grounds neat, but also assists teachers with bulletin boards, picking up papers on the school grounds and watering plants wichin the building. A library committee. An audio visual committee. A physical education committee. A music committee. A school store committee. A cafeteria committee which helps with seasonal decorations for the cafeteria and an award system for good cafeteria behavior.

The student government may be organized to hold classroom meetings the first week of the month. During the classroom meetings, a representative is selected in addition to at least one or more members from each class for the various committees. The second week of the month the various committees meet with their sponsor. The third week of the month, the committee chairpersons, classroom representatives and the elected officers meet. The fourth week is reserved for a school wide program. Guest speakers may be brought in for the program or classes may take turns for a monthly presentation.

The student government is also active in support of special programs throughout the year: food baskets at Thanksgiving, gifts for Senior Citizens at holiday times, UNICEF collection at Halloween, and assisting PTA at special functions.

The environment is enhanced with pictures of the student government officers and safety patrol officers hanging in the

foyer. The student government officers and committee chairpersons further develop a sense of positive environment by wearing banners at appropriate meetings throughout the year.

Elected student government officers attend a state conference and convention. Patrol officers are selected to attend summer camp. Students and safety patrols participate in the Annual AAA Safety Patrol Parade in Washington, D.C. Safety Patrol belts have students names printed on them.

The evidence of the Positive School Environment can be felt by the students in given situations: birthday ribbons, glad notes, daily or monthly citizens or student of the week or month pictures being displayed, a student government talent show where everyone is a winner. Students and staff kickball or volleyball games, a bulletin board solely for student notices. Field Day activities, an annual physical educa- Fun-Run.

Letting students take active participation in school committees creates an environment of responsibility. Further responsibility can be given to students in operating the school store, calling busses over the P. A. system at the end of the school day, giving the opening announcements and the pledge to the flag over the P. A. system each morning to start the school day.

Students take pride and accept the responsibility given them through their role in student government and general involvement.

The Seventy-Sixers Club is a part of the student government that enhances a positive environment while discouraging transiency. Sixth graders who have been in the school for seven consecutive years including kindergarten, are recognized as "special students" of the school. They get a 76'ers "T" shirt and do a skit on the last day of school. Students, from the age of kindergarten up, see this

recognition given to out going sixth graders. Early lower graders see the attainment of 76'er status as a very worthwhile social and educational goal and therefore strive to remain in that positive educational and social environment throughout their elementary years.

A Positive School Environment must permeate students activities not only to help the student grow academically, but also socially and emotionally as well.

Ideas on building a Positive School Environment through Communication:

Philosophy, discipline code, student activities and experiences that create a positive school environment do not generally happen spontaneously. Further, continuity in the promotion of the philosophy, the discipline code, or the student experience or activities must build one upon the other.

In order that the "wheel" not have to be reinvented each year, handbooks, memoes

and newsletters must be provided to record what is good and needs to be continued. These different types of communications also provide a vehicle for reminding, building and continuing those activities or projects which enhance the environment.

Some of these types of communication devices are the following: A daily memo from the Principal. The memo could list the teachers' duties or the schedule for the day, teachers that may be absent, names of substitutes, field trips being taken and reminders about goals or date-lines. The daily memo could also be in-spirational by using "quotes", a joke for the day, or recognizing the birthdays of staff members or a special accomplishment.

Another type of communication may be a memo given after every team meeting or administrative meeting. This memo would serve the purpose of having the same notes available for all the staff per chance they were unable to attend the meeting or had a different interpretation of what was actually said or decided upon.

If a positive school environment is to be maintained there must be handbooks and other communicative tools that record the desirable characteristics that must be enhanced or not compromised; a PTA Handbook, Pupil Rights & Responsibility Handbook, Separate 5 C's Student Handbook for upper and primary grades, Student Government Handbook, Student Yearbook, PTA Newsletter, School Newsletter, School Student Magazine, School Calendar, Administrative memoes, Team Leader Meetings notes.

School Board notes, central office information and professinal pamphlets and literature, all play a role in promoting a positive school environment through communication. Although many items in these types of notices are not applicable to the entire staff, those items that are relevant could be shared through the team leaders' notes or the daily memo.

Ideas for Building a Postive School

Environment through Teachers.

Teachers and staff must play an integral part in all aspects of promoting a positive school environment. It would be very difficult to promote a positive school environment without total staff support.

To this end there must be activities particularly planned for the staff that enhances their self esteem, and are designed to improve peer professional relationships and working conditions.

Suggestions to develop a positive school environment through the staff usually depends on how confortable the principal feels in delegating responsibilities and sharing his leadership. 1. Selection of grade school team leaders with rotation of responsibility. 2. Curriculum coordinators that give imput into budget and grouping decisions. 3. Volunteer Student Government Chairpersons.

Other activities on a more social level would be: Afternoon refreshments

on a weekly basis, monthly or special breakfast gatherings, inservice day lunch gatherings, seasonal parties at the home of one of the teachers. Teachers family night in the gym. After hours Wine & Cheese Parties, Jewelry & Craft Parties.

Ideas for Promoting a Positive School Environment through Awards and Recognition

The only reward most students get for academic behavior is the school report card. The type of reward may not always be positive inasmuch as the grades of the report card may not always be great. If we are going to have students feel good about themselves, their environment, and the school, there should be other memorabilia type indicators.

Much of this memorabilia could take the form of inexpensive treats or paper awards. For the primary grades a Good Working Tiger Badge given daily. At the end of the grading period, a Good Working Tiger Party/Treat could be given those students who obtain a pre-designated number. For the upper grades, an Honor Tea

could be held each grading period for those students making the honor roll. Names of those students making the list could be posted in the building.

Other awards that would be given daily, weekly or monthly: Citizenship awards, Tooth Fairy Certificate, Birthday cards or ribbons, Glad Notes.

Awards that may be classified as perpetual type plaques could take several forms: An Arbor Day plaque recognizing a contributor to the school with plants or shrubbery, a memorial plaque showing the name of an individual making a contribution to the school funds or service as a memorial.

The name listed on the plaque stays in the school and offers lifetime recognition in environment promotion.

Plaques that list past presidents of the PTA, Past Principals, PTA Life Membership Awards, Outstanding Teacher of the Year Awards, Outstanding Volunteers, all contribute to the environment.

End of the year awards given to students make lasting contributions toward the promotion of lifetime school environ-

ment. These end of the year awards could take the form of paper awards, iron-on-patches, certificates, plaques or trophies.

Awards that may be given generally at the end of the year: Certificate for Perfect Attendance, Certificates and patches for Presidential Fitness and Presidential Academic Excellence, end of the year trophies for outstanding good workers and honor roll students, academic certificate type awards recognizing the efforts of students in various academic areas, student government awards for the elected officers and safety patrol officers.

Awards presented to outstanding sixth graders: Citizenship Awards, Principal's Trophy, Assistant Principal's Award, Outstanding Athletic/Sportsmanship Award, any memorial type awards established by PTA or parents of a deceased student or patrons of the school.

The names of students receiving these awards can also be placed on perpetual type plaques that stay in the building. The perpetual plaques not only help to provide a positive lifetime environment but also contribute to the heritage of the building.

Ideas for building a Positive School Environment through Parents, PTA and Patrons of the Community:

The objective of a positive school environment is usually to make the students and parents feel good about their school.

The local Parent Teachers Association must not only be the recipient of a positive environment but also must be a contributor.

Their contributions must begin by being an active organization in manpower and monetary support. They must encourage parents to participate and support the instructional program: Classroom, cafeteria and gymnasium aides, homebound typist, library assistants, office clerks, clinic assistants, field trip/party chaperones and materials cut and paste sessions, etc.

Fund raising should not be the sole contribution of the PTA. However, funds are most often needed to help enhance an environment that cannot be fully supported by tax dollars. Fun Fairs, Craft Fairs, auctions, yard sales not only raise funds, but also have redeeming social value in bringing the community together. PTA funds should be encouraged to support what

instructional tax dollars cannot buy. These expenses are often looked upon as items, activities or expenses that make the school a nicer place for the children: Shrubbery or trees for the ground, pictures, paintings or plaques for the inner building.

The PTA can further promote the environment with its total support to a community school concept. Is there room for a Child Care Center to operate in the building? What about a Senior Citizens Program? Are there Adult Education Classes provided after hours? Does the school and PTA make rooms available after hours for the local Civic Associations or the various Scouting Groups that need a place to meet? What about those older students that formed a private jazz band...does the band have a place to practice other than the homes of those "kids"? Is there a place for Health Care and Parenting Groups to meet? How accessable is the building for the handicapped or a Handicapped Program, activities or other type of recreation?

The accessability and the use of the school building, after school hours, goes a long way in promoting a positive school

environment to much of the community which may not have students in the school. The PTA and general community patrons can play an important role in promoting this environment in having access to the building.

Finally, how well are the PTA and community type activities publicized: Is there a separate PTA/Community bulletin board? Are the names and phone numbers of PTA officers and committee chairpersons listed in a prominent place in the building?

Posting the names and phone numbers of your most active PTA patrons is most likely the only recognition these volunteers get for their effort. It is looked upon as recognition by their peers and it does contribute to promoting a positive environment.

Conclusion:

This paper made an attempt to assist fellow administrators in the promotion of a positive school environment. Many working ideas were shared from nine categories that related to positively effect-

ing the environment.

Administrators must generally remember that an ideal positive environment may never be achieved. Nor are all ideas shared in this paper applicable to all school settings. However, a careful selection of at least one idea from each of the categories made on a yearly basis should yield immediate benefits towards improvement of a desirable climate taylored to the school.